

South-East Asia Library Group Conference, Lund University, June 13-14, 2003

The South-East Asia Library Group Conference for 2003 was held on June 13-14 at the Asia Library at Lund University, Sweden. Lund is a small city of about 100,000 inhabitants with a history going back 1,000 years and picturesque old buildings including a fine Romanesque cathedral. Until the mid-17th century this part of Sweden belonged to Denmark, and the university was founded in 1666 to help integrate the area with the rest of Sweden. It now has about 38,000 students, though some of them are based at the larger city of Malmö and some at Helsingborg.

Nine delegates came to the conference, from Sweden, Denmark, England, France, Germany, the Netherlands and Russia.

The first day was taken up with a visit to Copenhagen. We first went to NIAS, the Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, the main centre for Asian studies in Scandinavia, founded in 1967. This is funded primarily by the Nordic Council of Ministers and serves the whole of Scandinavia, not just Denmark, though it does have links to Copenhagen University and is able to use its electronic facilities. The Library and Information Centre, NIAS LINC (www.niaslinc.dk) holds the largest collection in modern Asian studies in the Nordic region. It has a staff of three plus a student helper and a stock of about 30,000 monographs and 1,550 journals, about half of which are current. It aims to collect all major works on Asia in western languages in the social sciences and modern history, and is on open access. The Librarian, Marianne Nielsen, gave us a tour of the library and a talk on its operation and facilities.

In the afternoon Dr. Bent Pedersen gave us a tour of the Royal Library. This library (www.kb.dk), founded in 1648, is Denmark's national library and since 1927 has incorporated the library of Copenhagen University. It holds 4,700,000 volumes and has a staff of 324. A new building was erected in 1906, with an attractive garden behind, and an extension added in front in 1928. The unusual and impressive "Black Diamond" is an additional extension opened in 1999, facing the waterfront and with a link to the old library at first floor level. A road runs along between the two buildings at ground floor level. The new building is itself in two parts, with an atrium faced with glass between, and derives its name from its cladding in black granite. The ground floor contains a bookshop, concert hall, restaurant and café, and above are reading rooms, offices and special collections. A travelator carries readers up to the circulation area in the link to the older building. We were given a tour of both buildings which included being taken into the stacks of the old library which are built with floors of metal grilles, giving vertiginous views through to the floors below. Surprisingly, there is no air conditioning, even in the new building, and the offices are along the outside walls with large windows, making them very cold in winter and hot in summer.

The actual conference was on the Saturday in the Asian Library (www.ace.lu.se) in Lund, situated in a modern building in a University complex on the edge of the city. The University has 24 libraries at present, though some are to be amalgamated, and the Asia Library is itself an amalgamation of libraries serving the Centre for East and South-East Asian Studies and the Department of East Asian Languages, which teaches Chinese, Japanese, Indonesian and Thai. It is the main library for Asian specialists in Sweden. The conference began with a welcome from the Director of the Centre, Professor Roger Greatrex, who paid tribute to Annie's initiative in planning the library, selecting material and obtaining funding for it and outlined the policies and programmes of the Centre. Professor Hoadley of the Department of East Asian Languages spoke on the place of the Centre and Department in the academic environment, working in a situation where it is unusual, especially among the older generation, for the same people to have both language skills and subject expertise. He felt the Nordic lack of a colonial background gave Scandinavians the advantage of having a different and more impartial viewpoint on Asia. Discussion afterwards centred on the Internet – staff who consult it from their offices and don't bother to use the library (though it was pointed out that libraries were transmitters of knowledge not just collections of books) and students who compile essays from downloaded extracts without thinking out or even, sometimes, understanding what they are saying. Dr. Lieu Cao Thi from Marseilles spoke on the situation in France where little-known languages might cease to be taught if the lecturer teaching them left and where researchers didn't like to teach and might have knowledge too specialised for them to be able to teach the full range of a subject to undergraduates. A 30% budget cut meant that her library was unable to move to larger premises and administrative staff and researchers were being moved to Bangkok as the Thai Government had given them a building there. However, she was now able to catalogue online in Chinese, Japanese and Thai, and soon also in Burmese. Nicholas Martland spoke of problems of reduced budgets in the School of Oriental and African Studies, saying they may

need to reduce the range of subjects or languages taught. The programme ended with the Annual Meeting, at which Annie Troedsson was elected Secretary of the Group but Margaret Nicholson (formerly Secretary/Treasurer) continued to act as Treasurer

Altogether, it was a very interesting conference. Our hosts were very generous, funding two excellent meals plus a sandwich lunch. The hotel was comfortable and conveniently situated in the centre of Lund, very close to the old buildings of the University. Next year's conference is expected to be at Paris, coinciding with the EUROSEAS conference there in September.

Margaret Nicholson